August 20, 2018

CRCOG - Communications Plan
// Suggestions for Key Messaging, Audiences, Means and Metrics

In this strategic communications outline, we will address core recommendations for audiences, messaging, means and metrics. Below is an executive summary and a table of activities for our recommendations:

Executive Summary
CRCOG's extraordinary efforts have largely been behind-the-scenes; this strategic communications plan outlines how CRCOG can more effectively share its mission, core messages, services and outcomes with the constituencies that are most critical to CRCOG's future–namely, town officials, legislators, local strategic partners, the Connecticut press and the public. With the improved outreach program herein, CRCOG can gain more positive exposure and due recognition by those who matter most to CRCOG's future.

Table of Activities - Audiences, Core Messages, Means and Metrics

Audience	Core Messages	Means	Metrics
Town Officials	• Improved government efficiency and efficacy • Casework • Benefits of membership	• Biweekly email • Social media • Ambassadors • Onboarding • Website	• Live meetings • Email opens/clicks • Social media metrics (Likes/Shares/Follows)
Legislators	• Improved government efficiency and efficacy • Casework • Thought leadership	• Biweekly email • Social media • Ambassadors • News/press outlets	• Live meetings • Email opens/clicks • Social media metrics
Strategic Partners	• Shared news/press • Shared interest in CT success • Thought leadership	• Partner email distribution • Social media distribution • News/press outlets	• Email opens/clicks • Social media metrics
Press	• Casework • Commentary on current events • Thought leadership	• Email distribution • Social media distribution • Press releases • Press packets • Relationship-building • Print submissions	• Press pickups • Ad equivalency rates • Impressions
Public	• Improved government efficiency and efficacy • Casework and public advocacy	• Social media distribution • News/press outlets • Involvement in town meetings	• Social media metrics • Press metrics

Recommendation for CRCOG Core Messages

CRCOG performs many tasks for many constituents; however, CRCOG's communications efforts will greatly benefit from choosing a few overarching themes that can be used as anchors to any outbound communications CRCOG employs. That way, CRCOG can more clearly define its identity and impact, and have a guide by which to produce future content. We recommend CRCOG take up three core messages:

- *Facilitating cooperation with towns and CT-based organizations for the benefit of all.* CRCOG knows that when Connecticut's residents, businesses, elected officials and legislators share resources and cooperate with one another, everyone will be better off. CRCOG can solidify its role by using case studies and quantitative metrics to repeatedly make the case for cooperation. Part of this cooperative message should tie into economic growth and the nurturing of the business community – because when the region cooperates and improves itself, businesses will start, arrive and thrive, yielding more jobs and prosperity in the region.
- *Focused on how to provide value to each individual town, while elevating the entire community*. In order to support its cooperative message, CRCOG must take care to tell individualized town success stories, including town-specific case studies with both qualitative and quantitative evaluations that both make the case for CRCOG participation *and* support CRCOG's thesis that cooperation leads to individual town success. Formally, these reports should have a dedicated place on the website and be talked about in social media, highlighted in newsletters and email outreach, used in member onboarding documents and emphatically shared in meetings as proof positive of CRCOG's individualized work.
- *Helping towns to use CT tax dollars more efficiently and effectively.* One of CRCOG's most effective pillars is creating governmental efficiency by using new technologies, improved processes and shared resources. CT residents at large, legislators and town officials should understand that CRCOG stands for improved governmental efficiency and effectiveness. Any evidence that CRCOG's efforts directly contribute to efficiency and improved services should be touted in reports, social media, CRCOG's website, press, and other venues contained in this plan.

The most important aspect of any CRCOG communications initiative is creating message consistency; to that end, the three core messages above can be delivered to all audiences we will note in the next section. Furthermore, while CRCOG may wish to maintain a low profile at times, it can greatly benefit by publicly sharing its big, statewide wins while purposely including and sharing the spotlight with fellow COGs and other partners. That way, CRCOG can simultaneously herald its achievements, strengthen its agency relationships and further demonstrate its mission of *cooperation for the benefit of all*, leaving no doubt as to CRCOG's efficiency and effectiveness*.*

Recommendations for Audiences, Messages and Means

In this section, we will describe the specific messages, audiences and means that we recommend for each of the target markets referenced in the summary table on page 1.
   A. Town Officials – CRCOG should improve its reach to this vital constituent by reinforcing its three core messages, creating and highlighting member case studies, and ensuring that its member benefits are clearly articulated and understood. Ideal means include:
      i. Biweekly Email – Creating a new email template, written to all audiences on a master list, that categorizes and summarizes key CRCOG activities into digestible components with a "read more" option that leads back to CRCOG's website. The template should feature rich colors, big images and bold headlines.
         1. *Note: while we typically recommend segmenting groups in the email distribution, we advise collating all groups into a master email for the foreseeable future, and segmenting different groups* within *the body of the email, possibly via a color-coding system. That way, all readers can get to know CRCOG's breadth and depth.*

    ii. Social Media – Creating CRCOG master channels and encouraging members to follow CRCOG to get more immediate updates. Content should center on CRCOG activities, updates, statewide news, resources, and sharing the content of other organizations in the State – particularly content that relates to CRCOG's core message of *cooperation*. CRCOG could also benefit by creating private member groups (Facebook is ideal for this) to foster community and engagement among members.

    iii. Ambassadors – Beginning an ambassador program in which current members assist in recruiting new members and conducting personal outreach campaigns to target towns. We recommend contacting appropriate focus group interviewees to help develop this program.

    iv. Onboarding – Creating a new onboarding packet and formal orientation program to present to incoming town officials, to help them get up to speed on CRCOG.

    v. Website – Modifying the site to be more user-friendly; specifically, updating the navigation, adding case study templates, inserting more visuals and adding resources per member feedback.

B. Legislators – CRCOG can improve its reach to this critical group by engaging the following activities:

    i. Biweekly Email – per above.

    ii. Social Media – With social media, we never know who's listening; that means CRCOG can benefit from consistent distribution with targeted content meant for legislators as well as all constituents.

    iii. Ambassadors – Recruiting specific legislators to act as ambassadors on CRCOG's behalf and increase awareness, get difficult meetings and otherwise help keep CRCOG top of mind.

    iv. News/Press Outlets – CRCOG's "thought leadership" will be a critical component of it being recognized for its work. As part of this effort, CRCOG should create a media packet, curate a media list and continually drip news stories of CRCOG's work to TV, radio and print media.

C. Strategic Partners – CRCOG can immediately increase its reach, recognition and awareness by partnering with key organizations throughout the capital region that have legislative, political community and business community members (including MetroHartford Alliance and similar chambers of commerce, etc.). CRCOG can capitalize on these relationships with:

    i. Partner Email Distribution – CRCOG should ask to provide content to partners' email distribution lists to maintain a presence.

    ii. Social Media Distribution – per above.

    iii. News/Press Outlets – Where possible, CRCOG should create monthly press releases that include one or more organizations together, which helps provide legitimacy and increase the odds of the story getting picked up.

D. Press – Press members interviewed were actively awaiting news from CRCOG. To fill that gap, CRCOG should establish a drip campaign to press outlets that includes sharing case studies, commentary on current events in Connecticut and other thought leadership pieces showing CRCOG's skills and abilities. Key activities include:

    i. Email Distribution – Putting press onto CRCOG's master list.

    ii. Social Media Distribution – per above.

    iii. Press Releases – Establishing a dedicated PR person to oversee all press releases, media relations, interviews, etc. Press releases should be both proactive (about upcoming news) and reactive (responding to current or trending news).

    iv. Press Packet – Creating a press packet with important bios, headshots, prepackaged stories, areas of expertise and more, to encourage press to call on CRCOG for comments.

    v. Relationship-Building – Curating press relationships can be a manual process, further supporting the need for a seasoned PR hire who can take care of this critical role.

> vi. Print Submissions – CRCOG can submit weekly or monthly columns to local area newspapers to increase its presence among town officials, legislators and the general public.

E. Public – The majority of survey and focus group respondents recommended CRCOG become a more public-facing organization. Fortunately, any public-facing initiative will impact incoming legislators so they can have a chance to get to know CRCOG prior to their appointments. Key activities include:

> i. Social Media Distribution – per above.
> ii. News/Press Outlets – per above.
> iii. Involvement in Town Meetings – We recommend CRCOG claim a standing spot in town meetings and in town newsletters whereby CRCOG can insert its own news and updates.
> iv. Digital Access – Getting links to CRCOG on all member town sites.
> v. Signage – Getting specific CRCOG signage at large project sites funded by CRCOG.

3- to 6 Month Action Plan

Category	Recommendation	Potential Budget	Priority
Content	• Develop content strategy • Develop templates for social media posts, case studies, emails, etc.	$3,500 - $12,500	High
Social Media	• Set up CRCOG social media channels with best practices • Create social media content guideline and policy • Select CRCOG staff to manage content calendar	$0 - $4,700	Medium
Email	• Divide messages into pillars and headings for the email template • Assign CRCOG staff to providing content • Assign key person to assemble content and be the "voice" editor • Select new email distribution provider (cost TBD)	$0 - $2,700	High
Onboarding Package	• Write and design an onboarding package for town officials	$0 - $4,800	Medium
Ambassador Program	• Recruiting appropriate ambassadors and developing a plan	$0	High
Website	• Simplify navigation based on user feedback	$1,200 - $3,600	Medium
Press	• Write and design press packet • Build a media list	$0 - $6,300	High
Strategic Partners	• Build an appropriate strategic partner list for content distribution and begin personal outreach	$0	Low

Forward-Looking Recommendations

To assist you with strategic communications through the rest of 2018 and into 2019, here is a list of additional recommendations to assist the initiatives above:

1. Dedicated Staff or Consultant Services
   a. Social Media Manager – This position could help create copy and source content, distribute that content, manage email lists and distribution, perform light graphic design and maintain CRCOG's brand voice
   b. Public Relations Manager – This position could help maintain critical press relationships, consistently drip news and gain valuable pickups and reach for CRCOG
2. Technology
   a. We recommend looking at a modern website overhaul in the next 12 months to better serve its constituents, per their feedback